



Indiana State Department of Health

Epidemiology Resource Center

Quick Facts

About...Ringworm

What is ringworm?

Ringworm is a fungus on the skin. It can appear on any area of the body and is often found on the scalp, groin area ("jock itch"), or feet ("athlete's foot"). Ringworm can be serious in people with weak immune systems. It often begins as a small red bump that spreads outward and each area of fungus has a red scaly outer ring with a clear center area. These areas may itch and can get infected if they are scratched.

How is ringworm spread?

Ringworm is spread by direct skin-to-skin contact or by coming into contact with combs, unwashed clothes, bedding, and shower or swimming pool surfaces. Animals, including dogs, puppies, cats, kittens, cows, goats, pigs, and horses, can also pass ringworm to humans.

Who is at risk for getting ringworm?

The fungus that causes ringworm lives in damp, close environments. Warm, humid settings that make you sweat can spread ringworm. Ringworm is common in young children; outbreaks can occur in schools, child-care settings, and nurseries. Children with pets can also get ringworm.

How do I know if I have ringworm?

Ringworm may look different in each body area:

- Scalp (tinea capitis) – Ringworm on the scalp is an itchy, bald patch of scaly skin. This form of ringworm is most common in children.
- Groin (tinea cruris) – Signs are itching or burning in the groin, thigh, or anal area. The skin in these areas is red and often flakes, peels, or cracks.
- Feet (tinea pedis) – Itching, burning, redness, and stinging between the toes and sometimes on the foot itself are signs.

- Body (tinea corporis) – Ringworm on other areas of the body often forms a ring shape that is reddish and causes intense itching. The skin inside the ring may look healthy. The rash can be dry and scaly or wet and crusty. Often there can be several patches of ringworm on the skin at one time.

How is ringworm treated?

When used correctly, over-the-counter antifungal medicine (creams and sprays) can treat mild cases of ringworm. Call a doctor for more severe cases or cases that do not improve after 2-4 weeks. A doctor can prescribe stronger medicines for these cases.

How is ringworm prevented?

Ringworm is common and can be difficult to prevent;

- Wash hands with warm water and soap often
- Always wash hands after contact with animals
- Clean common areas in child-care centers, gyms, and locker rooms
- Wear waterproof shoes or “flip-flops” in public showers and swimming areas
- Keep all clothes, including bedding, clean
- Avoid wearing thick clothing for long periods of time in warm, humid weather
- Check your pets for areas of hair loss and visit a veterinarian
- Avoid sharing items, like clothes, towels, hair brushes, and shoes
- People with ringworm should not swim in pools and should not play contact sports until lesions are gone.

All information presented is intended for public use. For more information, please refer to: <http://www.nlm.nih.gov/medlineplus/ency/article/001439.htm> and <http://kidshealth.org/parent/infections/fungal/ringworm.html>.

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